

# HALLOWEEN 2

When our esteemed editor called me up and asked me to see **Halloween 2** I must admit to becoming a little excited. After all, it was the first time that John Carpenter had returned to a genre that he had started with his enormous hit **Halloween**. The huge success that film spawned a whole flock (or should I say splatter) of rip-offs and cheap imitations. **Friday 13th**; **He Knows You're Alone**; **Terror Train**; **Toolbox Murders**; **Don't Go Into The House**; **Terror Eyes**; **Hell Night**; **Friday 13th Part Two** and so on have passed through the pages of this magazine, usually reviewed by the indefatigable Alan Jones. The teenagers, assorted gorey murders which rely on the skill of the make-up artists. They also feature scripts of frightening ineptitude, performances by has been/never weres (delete where appropriate) and rely almost totally on graphic gore to elicit audience response. They also usually make me feel a bit sick, usually for a variety of reasons that range from the fact that I've seen so much of this kind of film over the last two years and that like most viewers my response to the mechanics of such films is sufficiently programmed. The genre has created and then imitated its own clichés. In a way the Splatter Genre (and after two to three years of these things, and no end in sight, it deserves capitalising) has become as predictable as the B Western genre did in the 30s and 40s. These movies have become an alternative to a ghost train ride at a fun fair. Like such rides, splatter movies are cheap and tacky and deliver a thin thrill.

Carpenter's first run through in the subject, **Halloween**, was a superbly-crafted feature relying on suspense and dark menace to deliver a film that jolted audiences and managed to garner some sympathy for its characters. It introduced Jamie Lee Curtis to audiences and within a year she became the heroine of several like films including the ludicrously embarrassing **Prom Night**. Everything was *right* about **Halloween**. Its blend of horror and black humour received a terrific audience reaction (particularly in America) and apart from becoming the most financially successful independent feature ever made assured John Carpenter both a place in the film history books and made him a "bankable" director—something neither of his previous features **Dark Star** and **Assault on Precinct 13** had done.

With **Halloween's** megabuck ways it was only natural, that a sequel should be thought of (don't miss a trick, those Hollywood moguls) and the only surprising thing is that it has taken three years for that sequel to appear. The film starts with a run through of the end of the first film. Not the original footage I hasten to add, as Carpenter wasn't directing, but rather new director Rick Rosenthal. Some may say this is to give the sequel a style of its own, but I rather think it's more for the viewer to adjust to the fact that Ms Curtis has aged something more than the three years between films. Where in the first film she was able to play a 17 year old, it's something that just isn't believable this time around.

So with Donald Pleasence pumping six shots into The Shape and finding nothing but a bloody patch on the grass where the corpse

*Feature review by Phil Edwards*







should be, **Halloween 2** starts. I have to admit that for the first fifteen minutes I was hooked. With Carpenter's haunting synthesiser score echoing around the preview theatre and Dean Cundey's Panaglide camera cruising the streets of Haddonfield taking in the on-going trick or treating of healthy American children as Pleasence tries his damndest to find The Shape before he strikes again, I felt I was going to be in for a treat. But I wasn't. All Carpenter is handing out is a trick. A rotten, lousy trick of a movie. A movie, that had I paid to see it would have had me demanding my money back at the box office.

A great deal of **Halloween 2** takes place in a hospital where Jamie Lee has been taken after the attack of The Shape. Oddly enough, that's where The Shape heads off to finish off the harrassed teenager. For, you see (and I have no compunction in telling you this), it turns out that Jamie Lee is The Shape's sister. This plot revelation was obviously meant to be a surprise of some magnitude, sort of **Halloween's** answer to **Empire Strikes Back's** revelation that Vader is Luke's father (that didn't surprise me either) but with all the other plot inanities, it kind of fell flat.

While The Shape is roaming around killing off whoever he can find, we only see one patient in the hospital (I'm not counting the three babies in the nursery), a fact that is a little disturbing. I started thinking that medical expenses in America had skyrocketed and nobody could afford to go to





what Rosenthal had shot and felt the film needed a little extra something. He was right, of course. If the murders were taken out of the movie then what would be left would be boring. Rosenthal has said in an interview that he wanted the film to build slowly to a terrifying pitch. We must give him the benefit of the doubt and in all fairness don't think that the failure of **Halloween 2** can be landed at his feet.

It is a John Carpenter film, despite the fact that he didn't direct it, and really should be treated as one. The fact is that Carpenter co-wrote it (with Debra Hill), co-produced it and scored the film as well as shooting the extra "shock" footage and no doubt was responsible for the editing of it as well.

The really sad thing about **Halloween 2** is that John Carpenter's name is attached to it all. Carpenter certainly is a great and growing talent and we're all looking forward to **The Thing** with great anticipation. But if Carpenter lends his name and talent to another farrago like **Halloween 2** then he'll appear to be on the slide. Plotting faults in both **The Fog** and **Escape From New York** were acceptable and the fact that **The Thing** was not written by Big John indicates that he maybe aware of his own limitations in that department. But **Halloween 2** is simply stupid. Sure, in movies like this it is commonplace for protagonists to



hospital. Maybe Haddonfield is such a clean-living place that nobody gets ill.

The one patient that we do see is a small boy, who unfortunately has a razor blade lodged in his mouth and spits out gouts of blood whenever he tries to speak. Despite all the other scenes of gore in the film, and there are quite a few—we'll get to those in a bit—this sequence is the most disturbing and, in a way, disgusting. Where Carpenter managed the difficult task of blowing away a little girl in **Assault on Precinct 13** without disturbing our innermost feelings, the effect in **Halloween 2** is simply repulsive. To use such a graphically gory scene out of context is simply excessive and is meant (I'm sure) to act on a subliminal level. And if this is just the first ten minutes, what *e/se* is going to happen?

The hospital staff is also a little low. A couple of obligatory, well-endowed nurses, a couple of porters (one in love with Jamie, one smoking dope watching **Night of the Living Dead** on the Late Show) and a nightwatchman are all that staff the place. The nightwatchman is the first to go, with a hammer through the skull. Pretty soon people are being drowned in boiling water, drained of blood and getting nasty injections into the side of the eye. All these murders are lovingly lingered on in close up and most occur without dramatic build-up. They were just tacked on in fact by Carpenter after principle shooting was completed. Apparently, Carpenter wasn't too happy with



enter dark rooms when they know that something nasty may be waiting, but in this one they do it so often and with such monotonous regularity that one half expects them to leap through the doorway and yell "I'm here! Kill me!" The hospital is cloaked in almost total darkness, with just enough light to catch the glimmer of The Shape's weaponry.

There's lots of other tedious devices used. The phones are cut off by The Shape, but nobody thinks of using the two-way radios in the ambulances parked outside, or simply hot-wiring a car to get into town to get help. This illogic reached its height when Jamie Lee staggers out of the hospital, and after managing to avoid her murderous big brother, can't raise a scream as Donald and co pull up in a car. Even sillier is that she drags herself to the door of the hospital (Shape in slow pursuit) and rather than jump in the car that's parked two feet away and drive off, waits for help and The Shape to arrive almost simultaneously.

**Halloween 2** is full of such crass stupidity and despite its slick visual style, which matches the first film perfectly, ends up looking like one of its own imitators. It would be nice to think that this is the last in a long series of salacious sleaze pictures but reportedly **Halloween 3** is being considered. All I can say is that by the time it reaches our screens, John Carpenter's good name won't be anywhere to be seen on the film. I hope ●